

The Mystery of Hartley House

By CLIFFORD S. RAYMOND

Illustrated by IRWIN MYERS

Copyright by George H. Doran Co.

CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

"There was a lot of malevolence in Mr. Sidney's tone, a tremendous amount of hate. Richard Dobson uttered the quivering, quivering little cry again and started to run. As he got under way, he shrieked. It sounded like an old woman's shriek."

"Mr. Sidney started after him. He had that cane you saw him take out of this room. That was the one he was beaten down with."

"I think for a moment he wanted to kill Richard. He flourished the stick and yelled. Richard, being in a frenzy of fright, was stronger on his legs than his brother. He was off into the bush. Mr. Sidney stumbled and fell. He got up rather slowly, as if he were either hurt or as if his strength were leaving him. I could hear Richard shrieking farther off in the bush."

"When Mr. Sidney got up, he turned toward the house, and I ran to beat him here and found you."

Jed, rocked a while, and I did not say anything.

"I am decidedly shaken," he said after a while. "I was very fond of him, and I am a useless old man, an alcoholic of no account except to him, and he is dead."

"There is only one thing to do," I said. "Richard Dobson must be on his way to freedom tomorrow. We shall have to see to that."

Jed aroused himself for an instant. "You copy-book moralist!" he said. "You would interfere with a genial, lovable man's magnificent hate just because he is dead and your scruples have become important. You ought to choke. Let the brute Dick Dobson rot in prison. It's his desert."

"It can't be done, Jed," I said. "Tomorrow we'll go to Alwick prison and explain."

For me to act without telling Mrs. Sidney was impossible, and it was almost impossible for me to take the subject up with her. I saw her only for a moment, told her that, being acquainted with the facts, I thought I knew what the conscience of the house would require.

Her world had been destroyed; her light had gone out. She had no pride for herself; she shrank from the possibility of a hurt to Isobel, but I had judged the conscience of the house correctly. She would have protected Mr. Sidney against all the equities and justice in the world—that was her sin in her own esteem. But now he was dead; justice could be done.

I did not want to act without Isobel's knowing what I was doing. I hoped she would approve of what I intended to do, though I intended to do it whether she did or not. I had to tell the story.

"You are right, John," she said. "But how magnificent father was! He was stark Nemesis, the cleanest, purest justice there is!"

She was a bit ecstatic. They teach young ladies too many generalizations, I thought. There was no rhapsody in this; it was ugly.

Jed had one more flash of spirit as we started for the penitentiary.

"You poor old copy-book fool of a moralist!" he said. "Why can't your insignificant conscience be satisfied without doing a lot of damage to no good end? Hung you moralists! You wreck life. Richard Dobson can't be

can have it either way you want. You are going to force him out of the only place he has to live, and you are going to give him the tragedy of knowing that his life was wrecked."

"He is a rich man," I said. "Half the old Dobson estate is his. All of it is his. His brother was legally and is now actually dead."

"You are a worse man than I was," said Jed. "I never interfered with Mr. Sidney's scheme of punishment. You are trying to. His scheme was just."

"What's the use of this debate?" I exclaimed. "You are morally incapable of right doing."

"And you are a foolish collection of pious axioms," said Jed.

When we came to the penitentiary entrance, we encountered Morgan of the Metropolitan agency. He stopped me.

"You had me fooled," he said. "I really thought you didn't know."

"I did not know," I said.

"Didn't you!" he exclaimed. "You are here to see Richard Dobson. I followed my hunch. I know why this man Sidney never was younger than twenty years. You are here to see Richard Dobson because you are representing Arthur Dobson."

"Arthur Dobson is dead."

"I know he is—as a name; but he is alive as Sidney."

"Mr. Sidney is dead," I said. "We have come here to tell Richard Dobson that he can go free. I did not know who Arthur Dobson was until last night."

As Morgan stood before us on the penitentiary steps, I thought how true had been my conception of him as the inevitable. Mr. Sidney had outplayed fate, but it was by using the trump card death.

Morgan's face showed some unpleasant lines.

"What do you mean, that Sidney is dead?" he asked.

"He died Christmas night. I read his diary last night. Jed gave it to me. It is the one Dravada tried to steal. We came here at once to tell Richard Dobson."

"Let his brother Arthur tell him. Richard is dead," said Morgan, going on down the steps. "But I am not through with you people. Publicity is just as good now as it was before."

He got into an automobile, and was driven away.

"Something always happens to these moral consciences," said Jed savagely. "You'll learn life some day, young fellow. Now keep your mouth shut inside here."

The warden told us that Richard Dobson had died the night before. He had sustained a great shock the night he walked out of the penitentiary and was found on Mr. Sidney's grounds. The adventure not only overtaxed him physically, but it had affected his imagination. When the guards found him, after the message from Hartley house, he was incoherent and in a fever.

He never regained strength or rationality. He had been quiet at times, but at other times was in delirium. When delirious, he suffered chiefly from the delusion that he had seen his brother's ghost.

He died slowly and in great misery, the warden said.

"Now keep your mouth shut, you fool," Jed ordered—by merely prodding me in the ribs.

The warden was affected by the news of Mr. Sidney's death. He remembered him as the pleasant man who had called one day. It seemed to me that our visit, so shortly after Mr. Sidney's death, must appear as a thing strangely without purpose to the warden, but Jed was so apparently right in asking for silence at this time that I yielded to his prudential course.

The right and wrong of the Dobson affair was in the grave. Our departure from the penitentiary was awkward, I thought. The warden did not seem to find it so.

On the way back Jed presented, viciously, the sharp edges of our trouble.

"You have that fellow Morgan to deal with," he said. "If you are going to be moralistic, you will ruin the lives of two ladies who have trusted you. Morgan has to be bought. You are not doing anyone any hurt now. You are not keeping an innocent man in the penitentiary. You are not disturbing justice or defeating punishment. You are taking the surest means to the protection of the innocent by bribing this man to silence."

Of all the obvious things I might have said to this man who for a long time had terrorized the Sidney household, none seemed pertinent. They would have been imprecations and reproaches. They would have dealt with the past. He, as if he had a clean slate, was dealing with the future. It did Mrs. Sidney and Isobel no good to tell Jed that he had been a rascal and was unfit to advise.

"If you go to Mrs. Sidney," said Jed, "she will sacrifice herself and everybody else. Go to Miss Sidney and tell her that the family must pay Mr. Morgan \$20,000. He'll want \$50,000. He'll take twenty. Give it to him in five annual installments. At the end of five years he'll be harmless. You and Miss Sidney will have

established yourselves, and Morgan's story will be a dried-up walnut."

The proposal was so repulsive that I did not answer Jed. He said a great deal more in a great deal of bitterness, chiefly against me and what he conceived to be my moralistic ideas.

When we had returned to Hartley house, Jed said:

"Do at least one thing, ask Miss Sidney what she prefers."

I had no right and no inclination to make a decision which concerned the family and not me. I did not want to speak to Mrs. Sidney—Jed was right, her conscience might permit only the answer which would expose the family to consequences. I spoke to Isobel.

We compromised with Morgan. Jed again was right. Morgan wanted \$50,000. He took \$20,000.

Isobel had been insistent. She had been impatient of any suggestion that there could be anything immoral or dangerous in such compromising. Feminine morals are selfishly protective of things near and dear. A generalized immorality, an unembodied immorality, is to women unimportant. It is less than unimportant; it is impossible; it does not exist. This is a part of the instinct which nourishes and protects the infant.

"I don't understand you at all, John," she said. "Is there any question in your mind that we ought to protect my father's memory and my mother's peace of mind? You admit that even now this man Morgan can wreck the things we hold dearest. You admit that a small payment can protect these things. You know that the one thing of which we have more than we need is money, and you admit that we are not doing any person any harm by using it to bribe this man Morgan."

Of course, I had to give in.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mr. Sidney was buried by the pool on a bitter afternoon when the snow creaked underfoot, and the sun, in a cold blue sky to the southwest above the hills across the river, could hardly be regarded as a warm and sustaining star.

The servants were pall bearers—sad ones; and we had the chaplain from the penitentiary to read the service in the room Mr. Sidney had used. The sun came in the southwestern windows, and the canaries sang. Alid was afraid of strangers and hid himself. Otherwise it was Mr. Sidney's room.

We carried the coffin the half-mile in the bitter cold to the grave which had been dug by the pool with mattocks through the frozen earth. Mrs. Sidney took my arm, but walked the distance bravely. Isobel went as if she were a clear-eyed Spartan girl accepting life without a quaver or whimper, upon the terms offered. We left the remains of our gracious gentleman there.

So genial a man could not die. He still pervaded the house. He had not destroyed his influence. Even his room, his death chamber, remained jovial; but Alid attached himself to Isobel and could not be parted from her. He went to her room that night.

Necessity and delicacy both suggested that I go away for a while the following morning. It was necessary for me to establish myself in the city, in material and physical facts of lodging, and so forth, and delicacy intimated that I was an alien in the household upon a strangely fictitious standing.

I went away in the early morning, leaving word that I would return in a day or two to say good-bye. I came back the evening of the second day, by automobile from the city. I had been impelled to go back and had so far resisted the compulsion that I had missed train time. Then the impulse reasserted itself so irresistibly that I took an automobile for the 40-mile ride.

Jed met me at the door. His cordiality was unforced. It was the dinner hour. Jed suggested either some biscuits and sherry in my room or an omelet with mushrooms. Mrs. Sidney, he said, had been Spartan, but was in collapse. Miss Sidney was somewhere about—he did not know where.

I did not want anything to eat and went toward the library. Isobel was sitting there by the fire.

I had often seen her thus before. It was one of the familiar pictures I should remember. There were probably a half dozen others—none better than this.

She looked up as I entered.

"I am glad you are back, John," she said.

I could think only of a commonplace.

"I did not intend to disturb you," I said. "How is your mother?"

"Utterly and happily stupefied," said Isobel. "Her pain waits for her."

"And yourself?"

"I can't find a tragedy in it," she said. "I feel a sense of terrible but inevitable loss. I had reconciled myself to it. I can't be a sentimental rebel against life. His life was happy to the end. He would hate us if we

were morose. Please sit down, John." I did, in a comfortable chair. We looked at the fire.

"I'll be saying good-bye tomorrow," I said.

"What are you going to do?"

"I have made some arrangements. I'll build up a small practice. I may go to a small town. I think that would suit me. I haven't the temperament for a city. It is chill."

"You have really set yourself back by coming here," she suggested.

"Possibly," I admitted, "in purely material ways; but I have lived the wonder time of my life here. The sacrifice was cheap."

"But it was a sacrifice?"

"In a strictly pragmatic fashion, yes."

"You think of it as a sacrifice?"

"I do not. I think of it as my real



"You Presume That I Am Not in Love With You."

life. The rest of my existence will be the sacrifice."

"You are a simple sort of a person, John."

"I presume so. I have no reason to think otherwise."

"Where did you get your ideas of women, John?"

"I have no ideas of women. I am not presumptuous or, in that fashion, egotistic."

"Yes, you are," she said.

"I don't think you are right in saying that."

"You are presumptuous about me."

"I am not!" I exclaimed in hurt pride.

"You are," she said. "You presume that I am not in love with you."

(THE END.)

WANTED TO "GO IT ALONE"

Many Years Ago Missouri Declared Her Ambition to Become an Independent Republic.

Missouri once had intention of setting up as an independent republic all by herself. The Session acts, state of Missouri, 1838-1839, contain a memorial to the congress of the United States relative to the Santa Fe trade. It tells of an expedition of traders to Santa Fe in 1812 from St. Louis, though it is not specifically stated that they went over the Santa Fe trail.

The early Session acts of the Missouri legislature, starting in 1824, contain many interesting resolutions and memorials to congress on all manner of political and historical subjects. Incidentally the Missouri constitution of 1820 starts with the preamble that the citizens of the state agree to form and establish a free and independent republic by the name of the state of Missouri.

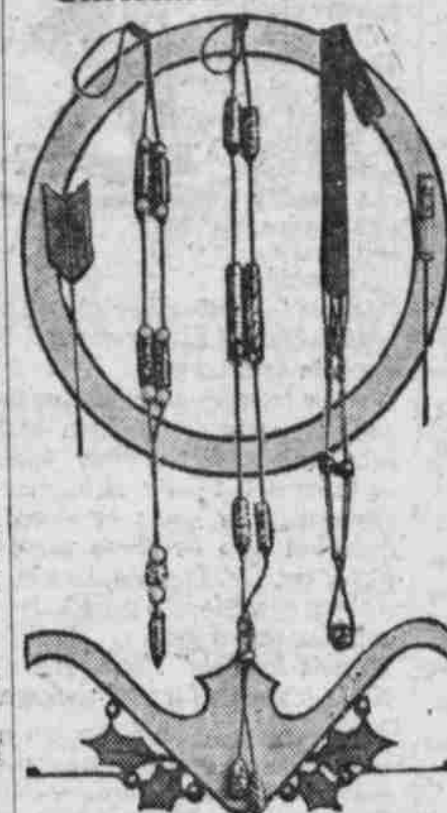
Missouri was one of the pivotal states in the history of this country. It was made such in the ancient fight in congress over the slavery question, which took up the admission of free and slave states and considered the balance thereof in congress. Missouri was also a pivotal state in yet another and larger sense—she was the jumping-off place for that wild and unknown country called the Wild West—the land west of the Missouri river. She made the midway point between the frontiersmen of Kentucky and those of the great plains, occupying a generation of history herself as a frontier commonwealth.

Value of Snakes.

Most people have a decided shrinking from snakes, which is not to be wondered at in tropical countries, where their bite is venomous and often fatal. But the grass snake ought not to be confounded with the rattlers, cobras or pythons. It is as harmless to humanity as a frog and a good deal more useful. No greater enemy to bugs is in existence. And slugs are among the most hurtful of garden and field pests. They keep down the numbers also of such other pests as mice, shrews and other small rodents. But as slug destroyers they deserve to be cherished rather than massacred at sight, which is their usual fate.

SOME CHRISTMAS PRESENT SUGGESTIONS THAT WILL AID YOU IN MAKING YOUR CHOICE

Christmas Novelties



Among the best of the novelties introduced for Christmas gifts are the handsome beads made of sealing wax. They are strung on silk cord with or without glass or steel beads. The wax is heated over an alcohol flame, the colors combined and the beads shaped over a knitting needle while the wax is soft. Pretty hatpins are made in the same way.

Robe for Baby



When his majesty, the baby, rides out in state after Christmas, he may find himself possessed of something splendid in the way of carriage robes, like the rich affair shown in the picture. Satin ribbon makes the robe.

Light and Phone Screens



As screens for electric lamps or for telephones, beautiful laddies from France, dressed in the crinoline styles of long ago, make useful as well as highly ornamental Christmas gifts. Their draperies of silk are supported by a wire frame. Imported heads of bisque are required for them.

New Christmas Pillows



Christmas time brings out a lot of handsome new pillows, because they are gifts suited to everyone. Above, two are pictured, one made of changeable taffeta and one of satin ribbon. They will suit either living or bed rooms. The circular pillow of taffeta is shirred over cotton cord and the oblong pillow is edged with a frill.

Rag Dolls



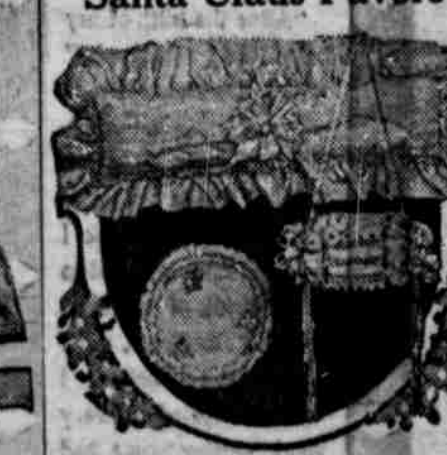
Every Christmas the rag doll makes its appearance. There are rag dolls of high and low degree. Two high-class little persons are shown in the picture. These are made of heavy domestic cut by a paper pattern which can be bought. Their faces are painted with water colors, their hair made of yarn, and they are completely dressed with clothes that afford the joy of taking them off and putting them on. Even their slippers may be made of black oil cloth. One of these baby dolls is supposed to be a boy and he has a pair of rompers instead of a dress under his coat.

Gifts That Please



Of all the practical gifts that are sure to please there are none more dependable than good-looking waste baskets. There are many kinds to choose from but, valued most, are those made of home of fabrics, as cretonne, satin, tapestry, satin, colored oilcloth and other things. Foundations of heavy cardboard or light wood are covered with these materials. Two attractive baskets are shown in the picture above, one of tapestry and satin and one of heavy oilcloth. The latter is provided with a handle of braided cord for hanging.

Santa Claus Favors



Christmas wouldn't seem natural if a new pin cushion failed to make its appearance.

Three new ribbon-covered cushions shown above include a long roll covered with moire and edged with a frill of plain ribbon, a small round affair edged with lace, and a barrel-shaped, hanging cushion, decorated with lace, baby ribbon and satin-covered fruit.

Gift Muffs and Furs



Those wonderful plushes that are now known as "wool furs" make neckpieces and tufts that are just as warm, just as handsome and more durable than those made of skins, and they are not at all hard to make. A set made of sea plush is shown here.



Mr. Sidney Started After Him.

outside the penitentiary. He has no money, no way of making any, no place to go, no friends. You are going to throw him out of his home. You are going to torture him with the knowledge that his life was wasted in prison when he was a free man in law. You are going to destroy the Sidney family."

"Richard Dobson saw his brother," I said, "that night at the pool."

"He saw a ghost," asserted Jed. "Or if he didn't see a ghost, he must want to stay in the penitentiary. If he knew it was his brother, why didn't he demand an inquiry and his freedom? Either because he saw a ghost or he does not want his freedom. You